

Waco Community Development

“Helping to inspire and cultivate healthy neighborhoods.”

August 2013



Vacant Property Task Force: Working Together for Impact

By: Alexis Christensen



Saturday morning a group of Sanger Heights' and Brook Oaks' residents went round robin to share what drew them to the meeting. Smiles and nods of understanding could be seen around the circle. Concern for their beloved communities brought unfamiliar people together to work for change.

The Vacant Property Task Force meeting had begun. For Kent McKeever, Director of Mission Waco Legal Services, finding solutions is what drew him in: “I wanted to start finding ways to serve the broader community with the legal tools that I have and our program provides, thinking outside the box in a way that is collaborative, innovative, community-driven, and with the goal of solving larger-scale community-wide problems. The task force seemed like a great place to try and cut my teeth in this way.”

Finding community-driven tools for impacting our neighborhood is just what we were doing. Seven months ago, my Waco Community Development colleague, Gabriela Gatlin, and I heard murmurings from community members wanting to address vacant structures in our area. Simultaneously, the number of fires in vacant homes in our neighborhood was increasing. The task force knew this was something they could address. In the early months, we educated ourselves on the processes of the City of Waco, meeting with representatives from Code Enforcement, Zoning & Planning, Housing and Community Development, Fire Department and the City Attorney's office. In these meetings we realized everyday residents really could impact their neighborhoods.



We wanted to share all that we had learned with our neighbors. Utilizing a community organizing tool called house meetings, task force members invited people from their circle of family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to discover common interests and concerns. The task force has hosted two house meetings thus far, educating people about the processes of the City of Waco to address issues like the timeline for burned home demolition and learning about shared interests. All of this knowledge helps

neighbors understand their role in addressing vacant structures. Many task force members shared they felt empowered to go out and participate in the process of addressing vacant structures. Currently the task force is operating in two subcommittees to accomplish our goals: Data Collection and Engaging Neighbors. We are working for long-term, sustainable change in our neighborhood.

If you're interested in joining the good work of the Vacant Property Task Force, please contact the Waco Community Development office at 254-235-7358!

CALENDAR

Classes

2013 Financial Literacy

6-8 PM for 6 weeks

Next class series

begins November 7th

Homebuyer Education II

Next class will begin

September 14th

1-6 PM

Memorials

In Memory of Opal Beard

Given by

Mr. & Mrs. Bill Beheler

Board of Directors:

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The newsletter of Waco Community Development whose mission is to help inspire and cultivate healthy neighborhoods throughout Waco.

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Unlikely School Visitors

By: Ryn Farmer

What do you get when you put a chinchilla, hedge hog, bearded dragon, turtle, ferret, coatimundi, and a baby kinkajou together in a school? Zoo Family Night! This summer, Waco Community Development is helping coordinate activities for the J.H. Hines Elementary and Brook Avenue Elementary families whose children are enrolled in summer school. Critters Exotic Pets, a locally owned and operated pet store, came to J.H. Hines Elementary for the first Family Night of the summer. They gave facts about each animal and let the children (and adults too!) take turns

petting the animals. The children laughed when they found out a newborn ferret could fit into a teaspoon. They were shocked when they discovered that it takes several hundred chinchillas to make a fur coat and some trembled with fear when the bearded dragon came around for them to pet. Each child received a free book and could choose to take home "Goodnight Gorilla" or "The Magician's Elephant". We are excited to continue creating opportunities for the families to become involved in the school and look forward to all of the Family Nights to come.



Welcome Priyanka!



I am so excited to join the Waco Community Development team as an AmeriCorps VISTA! I was born and grew up here in Waco, graduating from Baylor University in 2010 with a degree in Interior Design and Business Administration. I have always had a passion for working with the community, empowering others and seeing positive growth and development. I love everything about music, traveling and being immersed in culture, unique design/architecture, and cups of coffee with friends.

Since graduating, I have discovered an interest in Social Entrepreneurship (the creation of innovate, sustainable solutions to social problems) and hope to pursue this further in community projects and future graduate studies. I have worked with organizations, such as Mission Waco assisting with poverty education and training, and working with the fair trade market and micro-credit/development projects in Haiti. I also volunteer with and support other groups locally and internationally that are involved with fair trade and issues of social justice. I am currently working with Baylor University's Community Engagement & Service Department in which my responsibilities include campus service projects, involvement with local nonprofits such as AVANCE, and program development opportunities with The Parent Resource Center at South Waco Elementary. I have really enjoyed being involved with the Waco community after college, learning to love my hometown even more and being a part of the exciting growth that is taking place.

Through Waco Community Development, I will be researching microfinance to explore the possibility of expanding our Individual Development Account and Financial Literacy programs to include small businesses this would include working in cooperation with existing small business development groups in Waco. I believe, as Frederick Buechner says, that "the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." I am thrilled to be able to have this opportunity to work with Waco Community Development!

Thriving Community on North 14th Street

By: Gabriela Gatlin



Do you remember the days when you could share meals, garden produce, and daily greetings with your neighbors? Those days are alive and well throughout North Waco and particularly on one block of North 14th Street where Kelly and Billy Lawson bought an older home that Waco Community Development remodeled.

Diverse housing stock with strong homeownership is a salient feature on this block of North 14th Street. Of the twelve houses on the block, nine are homesteads. Of the nine homesteads, one is a new construction Waco CD house, two are Waco CD remodels, and one is a City of Waco remodel. There is also a Mission Waco residential drug and alcohol treatment ministry and two houses are rental properties. Kelly Lawson shares some reflections about life on their block:

1. Describe some of the ways you've connected with your neighbors since moving to North 14th Street.

One way we have connected with our neighbors is through a weekly meal exchange. Every Thursday night, we do a meal exchange with our across-the-street neighbors. Our next door neighbor to one side is the Mission Waco Manna House. One of the guys is always outside to share a friendly hello and conversation one day when our dog got out, they let us know and helped us bring her back. When our previous dog passed way, the Manna House residents brought us a sympathy card. And we've been known to share some baked goods with the guys at the Manna House. Our neighbors on the other side of us are a great couple with whom we exchange fruits and vegetables from our gardens.

2. What has surprised you about the neighborhood?

How close-knit the neighborhood really is. The awareness that people have of what everyone is up to and just how much the residents truly care about this neighborhood. I see people take real pride in their homes in this neighborhood; on our block alone in the past two years we've enjoyed seeing several home improvement projects. One of our favorite things to do is sit on our front porch – I love how others on our block love to do the same thing. We see our neighbors regularly and they see us.

3. Why did you choose to live in North Waco?

We originally moved into this neighborhood to be in close proximity to members of our church. Many individuals and families who are active in the life of our church call the North Waco neighborhood “home”. We think the diversity (economic, racial, generational) that this neighborhood offers makes it a great place to raise our two young daughters. They have the opportunity to know all kinds of people!

Freedom from Debt

By: Darrell Abercrombie

We live in a nation known for the freedoms that it offers. We have freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and others. However, the freedom that very few Americans experience today is the freedom from debt.



Americans are drowning in a sea of debt. Many of us have become slaves to lenders in today's economy. Visa could stand for “Volunteering for Institutional Slavery Always.”

So many of us are like the Seven Dwarfs who lived with Snow White. When we leave for work each morning we sing a familiar song, “I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.” Someone once said, “Money talks, and it regularly says ‘Good-bye!’”

In 2012, CNN Money, a financial website, stated that the average American household with at least one credit card now has close to \$15,000 in credit card debt alone. That is not counting automobile loans, student loans, and home mortgages. The sad thing is that debt has become a way of life. There are now three groups of people in our nation: The Haves, the Have-Nots, and the Have-Not-Paid-For-What-They-Have. Instead of living for the future, people are now paying for the past. Debt has become the new addiction.

While there is a lot of bad news about debt, there is some good news as well. You don't have to be a slave to debt. We offer individual counseling and educational classes to help people address and overcome their debt. We teach principles that help you find out where you are now so that you can plan on where you want to be in the future. After you increase your financial knowledge from counseling and the classes, you will start making informed and appropriate decisions about your finances that will help you improve your financial security. Then, you can start saving for the future, buying homes, paying off debt, and becoming free from debt.



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Waco Community Development helps to inspire and cultivate healthy neighborhoods.



<https://www.facebook.com/WacoCommunityDevelopment>

This is an Impressive Project!

By: Mike Stone

"I really appreciate what you are talking about doing for my house," said Fred. "I'm having a tough time. After my wife died, I have been living by myself. Then last fall, I had a stroke and I can't drive to the store. I can hardly walk and I can barely speak. I get a lunch delivered to my house once a day but they may have to stop delivering if the porch isn't fixed."



We went out to the porch and he pointed out all of the soft spots and holes in his porch. "This is a 100 year old home," Fred explained. "I worked on it when I was younger but not now." Right then, we agreed to redo the entire porch, making it safe for him and for his meal service. We also contacted a local agency to help with weekly transportation to a grocery store.

Fred is just one example of the many people we are helping with World Changers Waco. Twenty Waco families will receive important home repairs with the cooperation of 250 volunteers from all over the country who come to Waco for one week.

The City of Waco and Paul Meyer Foundation provide funds to purchase the materials and Scott Rhodes of Brazos Meadows Baptist Church recruits 150 local volunteers to help provide lunches for the volunteers. Columbus Avenue Baptist Church hosts the volunteers at their church during the week of service, and Waco Community Development screens and selects applicants.

This time of the year was really special to me as I was able to participate with 250 people from out of town and 150 people from around Waco to help serve 20 families in 1 week under the name of World Changers Waco. I look forward to World Changers projects next summer in hopes that we are able to help even more families in Waco.



BY THE NUMBERS

Housing:	
Homeowners:	217
New Homes:	50
Renovated:	16
Opportunities:	
Counseled:	1554
Active:	93
Maintenance:	
Volunteers:	6,635
Vol. Hours:	60,687
Lots Mowed:	2,745